A MOTHER IN ISRAEL:

A SERMON

PREACHED IN EASTHAMPTON,

AT THE

FUNERAL OF MRS. SARAH WILLISTON,

SEPTEMBER 21, 1845,

BY

REV. HEMAN HUMPHREY, D. D.

PITTSFIELD, MASS.:
PRINTED BY CHARLES MONTAGUE.
1846.

A MOTHER IN ISRAEL:

A SERMON

PREACHED IN EASTHAMPTON,

AT THE

FUNERAL OF MRS. SARAH WILLISTON,

SEPTEMBER 21, 1845,

BY

REV. HEMAN HUMPHREY.

PITTSFIELD, MASS.:
PRINTED BY CHARLES MONTAGUE.
1846.

DEDICATION.

TO HIS BEREAVED AND

VENERABLE FRIEND, THE

Rev. PAYSON WILLISTON,

IS THIS DISCOURSE AFFECTIONATELY

DEDICATED, BY

THE AUTHOR.

SERMON.

Judges, V. : VII.—"A Mother in Israel."

How many endearing and sacred associations cluster around the name of Mother. It is the first name which lisping infancy learns to utter, and in every truly filial heart, it excites the tenderest recollections, to the latest period of life. To no human care and yearnings, can any one be so much indebted, as to the ever flowing, ever wakeful and unquenchable love of a discreet and pious mother. A graceless prodigal, who "mocks at his father," may "scorn to obey his mother"—may neglect her in her poverty, sickness and old age—may try to forget her—may spurn away from him that tender solicitude, which clings to him when every other being has given him up:—may break her heart and send her to an early grave; but he cannot extinguish the maternal flame in her bosom, till it ceases to heave;—it is love, "which many waters cannot quench, nor the floods drown." The son, or daughter, whether young or old, who

does not cherish the warmest emotions of reverence, gratitude and affection towards a mother, while living, and embalm her memory among his most sacred reminiscences when she is dead, deserves no memorial nor place, on the catalogue of the wise and good.

Have you not observed, how men of the highest intellectual and moral worth, love to talk of their mothers; and how tenderly and reverentially they treat them—how gently they bear with their infirmities—how cheerfully they minister to their comfort. One of the brightest traits in the character of Washington, was his tender reverence for his mother. And what can be more touching than some of the examples of this sort which are recorded in the scriptures. Let two of these suffice. When just after his accession to the throne of his father David, the mother of Solomon came into the magnificent pavillion where he was sitting in state, "The king rose up to meet her, and bowed himself unto her, and sat down on his throne, and caused a seat to be set for the king's mother; and she sat at his right hand." What a delightful spectacle of filial reverence in the greatest monarch of the age! Verily, "Solomon in all his glory," never appeared more glorious than on that occasion.

The other example is unspeakably more touching, even than this, for an infinitely "greater than Solomon" was there. "There stood by the cross of Jesus, his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the

disciple, Behold thy mother!" They were the last words he uttered, save the simple exclamation, "I thirst," till he cried, "It is finished; and gave up the ghost." He could not die, till he had provided a home for his mother, and no earthly name so sweet upon his expiring lips, as that of MOTHER.

But although the simple name awakens more tender emotions and recollections than any other mere human appellation, there is room for higher and lower degrees of interest even here. All mothers are not equally deserving of honor and affection. A pious mother is a greater blessing to a family, than one who is not pious, whatever other desirable qualities she may possess. And a mother in the Church, one who is looked up to as an example of benevolence and active piety—one who, while she discharges all her domestic duties with fidelity, and is ripening for heaven herself, abounds in prayers and alms, and love to the household of faith, is a mother in a still larger and higher sense. She is A MOTHER IN ISRAEL. Such a mother was "Deborah, the wife of Lapados," who went out to encourage Barak against the invasion of Sissera, a heathen king, that threatened to swallow up the heritage of the Lord, in the days of the Judges. Few women have been so highly distinguished as she was, in gifts and in zeal for the defence and upbuilding of the Church. But there have been many mothers in Israel since, of a like spirit—many pious and devoted mothers of families and members of the church, who have been eminently active and useful, in the discharge of all their appropriate duties. There are not a few such, blessed be God,

still spared to this sinful generation; "followers of those, who through faith and patience, inherit the promises."

In this case, as in every other, the greater includes the less. A real mother in Israel, if she has children of her own, will strive to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," and will conscientiously discharge all her household and social duties, while she is tenderly alive to all the interests of the church. Her love for Zion, will be so far from disqualifying her for her domestic station, that it will increase her love for her own household, and make her more faithful in the performance of every domestic and maternal duty.

It will be my object in this discourse, to hold up the character of a true mother in Israel, for the study and imitation of all mothers, whether young or old, whom it is my privilege to address.

And 1. A mother in Israel tenderly nurses and watches over the health of her own infant offspring. To this she is prompted, as well by a sense of duty, as by the yearnings of maternal affection. The enquiry with her is, not how she may shift off the task upon somebody else—a servant, a stranger, or even the dearest relative she has in the world, but how she may discharge her own duty in the best manner. She considers that she sustains a relation to her helpless babes, which no other person can sustain, and her prayer is, that she may have strength and grace given her, to meet all her tender responsibilities. She receives her children from the Lord, not as so many burdens and hindrances to her own freedom and fashionable indulgences, but as heaven's

precious gifts; and as she folds them in her arms, and presses them to her bosom, she hears the voice of God saying to her in that hour, "Take these precious little ones, and nurse them for me." Some who bear the relation of mothers, and are obliged to take upon themselves the nurture and care of their infant offspring, may regard it as a trial—almost a calamity; but a mother in Israel is so far from looking upon it as a burden, that it affords her the purest enjoyment; and it is a great affliction, when her own health and strength do not allow her to perform the tender office of a mother.

2. A mother in Israel, cheerfully undertakes the early government and education of her children. She does not try to throw the responsibility upon others, to whom it does not so properly belong. She does not when the buddings of waywardness begin to show themselves, pass them over with the fond hope, that they will some how be nipped without her interference. When she finds them impatient of restraints, and clamorous for hurtful indulgences, she does not suffer her maternal feelings, either to blind her judgment, or govern her decisions.

On the contrary, she looks upon herself as the responsible governness in the nursery; and just so much more responsible than even the father of her children, as she is by nature, as a mother, and by her domestic advantages, better qualified than he. A true mother in Israel, takes great pains, by sweet and winning appliances, to mould the temper of her little ones, as they lie upon her knees, into the most amiable forms. She watches the earliest risings of insubordina-

tion in her heaven-appointed domain, and promptly represses them, whatever time or exertion it may cost. She feels it her duty to establish her authority so early, that her children cannot remember the time of their first unconditional submission. This she will do by mildness and persuasion if she can. But she will not hesitate to resort to severe appliances, when they become absolutely necessary. When other means fail, she will not "spare the rod for their crying." That is a spurious and unscriptural tenderness on the part of the parent, which withholds smarting chastisement from a wayward child. While a true mother in Israel will not have recourse to the extreme reason, till she has tried all others and they fail, she will then without hesitation use stripes and will justify herself, by appealing to infinitely higher authority, than the most transcendental theorists of the age. And having learned from experience, in the discharge of her own duties, how froward young human nature is, in sending them to school, she will be slow to put them under the care of a teacher, who is so much wiser than Solomon, as to advertise his pupils beforehand, that do what they may, no corporeal terrors will ever be brandished over them.

I have said, that a mother in Israel will undertake and superintend the early education of her children. But few, even of those who write on the subject of education, fully appreciate the importance of a right beginning in the nursery; and fewer still, perhaps, consider how much depends upon the teaching of a sensible and judicious mother. Some of the most powerful and abiding educational influences, lie

back of what is commonly regarded as the commencement of juvenile instruction. To *educate, is to lead along, to allure, to guide.* The education of every child ought to be begun, while it is in the cradle. Much may be done, to promote a vigorous and healthy development of its physical system and to make lasting impressions on its mind, within the two first years. The little pratler will not of course be at all aware of the influences which are moulding its moral and intellectual character, but they will not be the less real on that account. The child may have no more unconsciousness of the moulding influence of maternal impressions, than the twig that is bent in the right direction, by her hand. Still that influence works and fashions, however secretly. "The child is the father of the man." It would require all a mother's instinct and invention, to specify the thousand ways, in which the plastic mind of a child may be reached; and every true hearted mother in Israel, who has a little family growing up around her, will make it her constant study, how she may pour light and truth into their docile minds. Every day something will be added; and the aggregate, thus imperceptibly accumulating for six or eight years, will equal and often surpass the most sanguine anticipations of the proudest parent. The effects of subsequent training, are far more palpable no doubt; but it may be fairly questioned, whether more is ever done, to give shape and tone and symmetry to the character, in the same number of years, than is done in the nursery. It is there, that a mother in Israel exercises her educational influence to the highest advantage.

3. A mother in Israel uses her best endeavors, to bring up her children in habits of industry and economy. The stress which she la s upon these household virtues, will almost always be modified, I am aware, by more or less easy circumstances in life. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to make the children of wealthy parents feel the necessity of being saving and industrious, as you can those, who see and know, that they must depend upon their own earnings as soon as they are old enough to take care of themselves. Every pious and fore-casting mother in Israel, however, will feel it her duty to insist, that her children shall not be idle, nor contract wasteful habits. If they are looking for a large patrimony, she will remind them how uncertain such expectations are, and how often they are disappointed; and will urge upon them the duty of preparing for whatever reverses may happen. She will also show them their accountability to God, for the useful improvement of their time, and how if they inherit or earn property, they are bound to be industrious and saving, that they may have the more ample means for doing good.

If she is poor, and obliged to make great efforts, and to economize with extreme carefulness, as a widow, or to aid their father in feeding and clothing them, the lesson is more easily inculcated. Coarsely fed and scantily clad as they must be, they cannot help feeling the necessity of personal efforts—of beginning early, to rely upon what they can earn, for their own support. But while such a mother as I am describing, will find something for every child that is old enough, to do, she will guard against fostering a penurious

habit, by encouraging them to give liberally from their earnings, for charitable purposes. She will teach them that the value of property, whether it be little or much, does consist in its being hoarded up, but liberally used in doing good. If any of her children grow up in idleness, or in habits of wasteful expenditure, or to love money for its own sake, it will not be for want of right maternal instruction.

4. Every mother in Israel, of an enlightened and benevolent mind, will seek the best education for her children, which the circumstances of the family allow, and their own future usefulness and happiness require. She will not undertake impossibilities. With but scanty pecuniary means at command, she will not vie with the rich, in sending them to the most popular and expensive school: but will spare no pains, on her part, to enrich and cultivate their minds. And it is no less delightful, than it is surprising to see, what efficient aid a sensible and pious mother will render, in the education of her children—how she will take upon herself the task of early instruction—how she will make them love their books—how she will inspire them with a thirst for knowledge—how she will encourage them to overcome difficulties in their studies—how carefully she will watch their progress, and "how softly she will lead them on as they are able to bear it."

It is true, there are but few mothers who have the leisure, if they had the ability to superintend the studies of their children, in all the branches of a good education. Their domestic cares forbid it, and there are some things, which their sons especially, ought to learn, that they cannot teach.

But what a mother, who is bent on raising her family above their condition in mental culture, cannot do herself, she will contrive to accomplish in some other way. If in humble circumstances, she will "rise early, and sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness," to make and mend their clothes, and to earn the means of purchasing them books, and sending them to school. She will keep her eye always upon them; will expect and require frequent reports from their teachers, and will, in various other ways, show them how deeply interested she feels in their improvement.

Mothers, in general, I believe, are not fully away of their own power, in this department of their childrens' education. They do not know how much they can do themselves, and by their influence with fathers, to furnish the means, and with instructers to make the most of them. "A great cloud of witnesses;" a multitude of the most distinguished and useful men might be cited to testify, that they are more indebted to their mothers, for what they are, and what they have done, than to any other human agency. And how must such a mother, in her old age, rejoice over her dutiful children, whom she has been thus instrumental in training up for honor and usefulness.

5. The chief and most anxious care of a pious mother in Israel will be, to "bring up her children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." No worldly interest, in her estimation, bears any comparison with their spiritual welfare. While the first and great concern with many mothers is, that their children may get rich, and be highly esteemed among men, her prayer is, that her's may "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,"—that they may

"lay up for themselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth corrupteth, nor thief approacheth." There is a burden upon her tender spirit, which she cannot throw off, which she does not wish to throw off, till "the Christ is formed in them, the hope of glory." She longs to have them consecrate themselves to God in early life, knowing that they are always exposed to death, and that there can be no safety for them, either at home or abroad, till they are "born again." She desires, above all things, to see them truly enlightened, growing and established christians. And to this end, while she commends them daily to God in prayer, she remembers, that he blesses the means of his own appointment, and gives no encouragemet to parents, who neglect the religious education of their offspring. She gives them "line upon line, and precept upon precept." "In the morning she sows the good seed, and in the evening withholds not her hand." She teaches them from the Bible, before they are able to read it, and as soon as they are old enough, she puts it into their hands as God's book, and spares no pains to interest them in its history, in its promises, in its threatenings; and above all, in the thrilling story of the birth, life, miracles, sufferings, death, and resurrection of Christ, and the way of pardon and acceptance, through his atoning sacrifice. She catechises them from Sabbath to Sabbath; requires them to commit psalms and hymns to memory, and recite them upon their little stools by her side, and above all, teaches them to pray to their "Father who is in heaven."

As a true and faithful mother in Israel, begins to imbue

the minds of her children with religion at the tenderest age, so she perseveres as their faculties expand, and they grow up like "olive plants" around her board. She varies her fireside instructions to suit their respective ages; taxes her best resources to make her teaching as interesting and winning as possible, and though often tried by their "slowness of heart to believe," still "strengthens herself in God," and waits for the fulfilment of his great and precious promises. When they leave her for the seminary, or the counting-room, she follows them with her prayers and her letters, full of maternal love and advice; and however they may forget her, she never looses sight of them, till she or they, are laid in the grave. As long as they are with her, her pious instructions "drop as the rain and distil as the dew," and when they are far away, she has "no greater joy than to hear that her children walk in the truth."

6. A true mother in Israel is a pattern of industry and economy, at the head of her family. Her piety is so far from interfering with her household duties, that the punctual and orderly discharge of these duties, is a part of her religion. Her christian character would be brought into serious question by the neglect of them. In the inimitable language of the royal preacher, "She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her candle goeth not out by night. She riseth up while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household. She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms. She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among

the elders of the land. Strength and honor are her clothing and she shall rejoice in time to come. Her children rise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her."

It is not necessary to understand this most beautiful commendation of a virtuous woman literally, in all its specifications. Allowance must be made for different ages, countries and states of society. But it more than justifies mothers, whatever rare exemptions there may be, in the habitual oversight of their domestic affairs, and the diligent use of their own hands. It matters not, that many a fashionable modern wife and mother, would not stand the test of such a scrutiny. It is nevertheless true, that woman's divinely allotted sphere, is the domestic circle at the head of her own family, commending both industry and frugality, by her own cheerful example.

Such a mother in Israel, as it is the object of this discourse to describe and commend, is a "help-meet" to her husband. The domestic arrangements of his house, are safe in her hands. As far as health permits, and need requires, she cheerfully relieves him of such family cares, as would swallow up his time, and interfere with the discharge of duties, which he alone can perform. Such a wife, every professional man and public servant especially needs, in the care of his house and in making many of the necessary purchases and disbursements for his family. It is surprising to see, how much a wife and mother, in straitened circumstances can do, by contrivance and economy, to eke out a small salary, and maintain a respectable standing among those, who are far better off. If she can-

not *create* food and clothing, she will furnish them by her own industry and good calculations, no one hardly knows how; and beyond this, will find the means of using that "hospitality" which is so necessary in public stations, as indeed it is, in most of the more private walks of life. It is impossible to estimate the amount of good, which many mothers in Israel have done, directly to their families, and indirectly to whole communities, by their household industry and economy. They have made every thing that is brought in, go twice as far as most of their neighbors; have contrived always to have something good for their friends; have kept their husbands as well as themselves from despondency, and in spite of every disadvantage, have brought their children forward into respectable society, and put them in the way to thrift, honor and usefulness. "Who can find a virtuous, a pious and devoted mother in Israel, her price is above rubies."

6. A real Mother in Israel, is a great blessing to the church. She "loves the gates of Zion," more than her own dear fire-side. The language of her heart is, "If I forget thee O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning." When Zion languishes and is in affliction, she mourns. When the church puts off her sackcloth, and the "spirit is poured from on high," and converts "fly as a cloud and as doves to their windows," she rejoices. Her place is never vacant in the sanctuary, when it is in her power to attend. "Her delight is in the law of the Lord." "His word is sweet to her taste." She loves the church prayer meeting. She loves the society of those dear sisters, who "speak often

one to another, where the Lord hearkens and hears, and a book of remembrance is written before him." If sickness or advanced age forbids her going abroad, she has the more time for meditation and prayer at home. Though she cannot be in the house of God on the Sabbath, nor with the church in its monthly or weekly meetings, for exhortation and prayer, her heart is there; and she sometimes experiences such refreshing, as she had rarely enjoyed, even when "sitting under the droppings of the Sanctuary." As old age creeps on, and she is admonished that "the time of her departure is at hand," she greatly longs to see the rising generation coming into the church; giving "the dew of their youth" to the Lord, and consecrating themselves, soul and body to his service in that "covenant, which is well ordered in all things and sure." Up to the last hour, she is loved and venerated as a Mother in Israel, and when she departs, no earthly interest lingers in her thoughts, like the interests of the church which she is about to leave below, that she go and join "the general assembly and church of the first born in heaven."

In the use and improvement of this subject, we are led to reflect,

In the first place, upon the great loss which a family sustains, when a Mother in Israel is removed by the stroke of death. What a mournful void does it leave at the table, at the fire-side, in every room of the house, from which she is carried away, no more to return.

Does she die early—does "her sun go down ere it is noon"—is she snatched away from a young and dependant

family?—how great is the loss to her children—in most instances how irreparable. They lose that warm bosom to which they used to fly, and that soft voice which quieted all their little troubles and lulled them sweetly to sleep. They lose that ever wakeful eye, which watched over their perilous childhood, and that beating breast, whose last pulsation was a prayer for them. They lose her instructions, her counsels, her experience, her examples, her prayers. They may be too young to feel her loss. They may never appreciate it while they live; but it is the greatest loss they could have sustained, especially in early childhood.

And what a stunning blow, what a loss to her husband! How are his joys blighted and withered. How are his fondest hopes blasted. How desolate is his heart—how empty his house—how cheerless the world! He is deprived of her society—of her cheerful greetings, when he returns from his toils, whether in the field or the shop, or in the discharge of professional duties. He is deprived of her fortitude to sustain him, when adversities and disappointments thicken around him; of her industry and economy in keeping his house; of her aid in the care and education of his children, and of her advice in matters requiring a tact and delicacy of perception, with which woman alone is gifted. But why should I enlarge? In the death of a pious and discreet wife, of a Deborah, of a Mother in Israel, when her children are hanging upon her knees, the loss to her husband and to them, though often experienced, cannot be calculated.

And even when her children are grown, when they are settled in life, and childrens' children are springing up around

her, and she comes "down to the grave, like as a shock of corn cometh in, in his season," her loss is a severe family bereavement. To the husband of her youth, the partner of her life, and the companion of her old age, it is irreparable. He may have dutiful children to lean upon, and to smooth the path of his declining years, as far as filial assiduities can go. He may be surrounded by all the blessings and comforts, that money can command; and every wish may be anticipated; but after all, "the desire of his eyes" is taken away. "He is alone, like a sparrow upon the house-top." He is a feeble and desolate old man. He cannot live long, but while he does live, he will feel his loss more and more.

Secondly. When a mother in Israel dies, it is a great loss to the church. Her days of activity may have been long past. She may have served God and her generation half a century, or more. Her eye may have waxed dim, and her strength may have departed. The world may have forgotten her; but still she could pray, and she "had power with God." She could exhort the younger members of the church, to "work while it is day"—not only to "work out their own salvation with fear and trembling," but to "glorify God in their bodies and their spirits which are his."

But her Master has called for her and she is gone. No more will she come to the sacramental table. No more will she be seen in the house of God, or at the social prayer-meeting. No more will the church enjoy the blessing of her society, her example, or her daily prayers. Her work

is done—her days are past—her tongue is silent—her mild and beaming eye is closed forever. She is gone. Those whom she has left behind in the church, will go to her, but she cannot return to them. "The places that knew her will know her no more forever." The church mourns, and feels that the death of a pious mother in Israel is a great loss.

Thirdly. I am sure you have anticipated me in the particular application of my text, to the present mournful occasion. A mother in Israel, whom most of you have known and loved and revered from your childhood, has just departed at the very advanced age of *eighty-two.*

Mrs. Williston was born in Stratford, Conn., in the year 1763; and was married to the Rev. Payson Williston, (then, and for fifty years your beloved pastor,) in 1729. Her father was the Rev. Nathan Birdseye, for many years pastor of the Congregational church in Stratford and who died in that town, in 1818, at the extraordinary age, of *one hundred three years, three months and nine days.* Though he lived four miles from the meeting-house, he came regularly to public worship, till he was more than *a hundred;* and I can never forget his patriarchal form, as he stood by my side, in the pulpit, which I happened to occupy for a single Sabbath, after he had entered upon his second century. And what is almost as extraordinary as his own longevity, the average age of his very large family of *twelve* children, was *seventy-seven years!*

What a mother to her children Mrs. Williston was, what a crown and blessing to her husband, what a pattern of chris-

tian industry and economy, what a model of genuine Puritan hospitality to strangers, what a comfortable "prophet's chamber" she always kept in her house, what a friend she was to the poor, how she sympathized with the afflicted, what a Mother she was in Israel, what a pattern of good works, what an example of all the christian virtues, how she "loved the gates of Zion" and the church of the living God—a great congregation of the dead, together with this living congregation who knew her longest and knew her best could testify. She loved you all. She loved your parents before you, and she loved your children for the father's and mother's sakes. She rejoiced with you in your joys and mourned with you in your afflictions. "The good works and alms deeds which she did," will long be remembered. "Though dead she yet speaketh." Her example still lives. Her prayers, we doubt not, are treasured up.

As our aged and now bereaved friend, who ministered to you in holy things for more than half a century, is the surviving father of two generations, so was Mrs. Williston a mother indeed during all that long period. If your venerable *pastor*, (I still call him so,) has been a rich blessing, not only to the church but to this whole community, it will never be fully known, how much he was aided and encouraged in his work, and how many family cares were taken off from his hands by her, whose remains are now before us, till the disclosures of the great day.

How much he feels his loneliness, and how much more he will feel it, when he returns from the grave to his desolate house, and during the remainder of his life, who that

has not in old age, experienced a similar bereavement can tell? I am sure your tender sympathies are all awakened for him in this hour of his affliction; for it is your venerated spiritual father, your religious guide and teacher in years gone by, who sits before you in his grief, and who seems to say with the bereaved patriarch, "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me."

There are those, blessed be God, "bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh," who will esteem it a privilege to anticipate all his temporal wants and to take upon themselves as it were the infirmities of his old age; but nothing I am sure will cheer his heart more, than your filial sympathies, and the assurance that he is remembered by you continually in your prayers.

Finally. We are admonished by the scene before us, that the longest life "is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away." "We spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are three score years and ten, and if by reason of strength they be four score years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow, for it is soon cut off and we fly away. So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. O satisfy us early with thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children."

Teach us, O Lord, how frail is man,
And kindly lengthen out our span,
Till a wise care of piety,
Fit us to die and dwell with thee.